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ABSTRACT

To be successful, inservice programs need to utilize cooperative learning activities and create collaborative support groups to assist implementation efforts after the inservice program has ended. Placing teachers in small, cooperative groups to discuss the material being presented in the inservice program provide the structure and mechanisms for them to give each other support and assistance while the material is tried out and integrated into their instructional activities. Cooperative learning experiences promote more positive attitudes toward the knowledge and skills being learned than do competitive and individualistic learning experiences. There is evidence that cooperative learning promotes higher levels of motivation and personal efficacy, and results in more positive peer relationships. The implications of using cooperative learning activities goes beyond the successful implementation of a new set of teaching strategies. As teachers and administrators become more skillful in interacting with each other in collaborative activities, their interactions with students and parents will become more constructive and effective. (JD)

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# The Key To Effective Inservice: Building Teacher-Teacher Collaboration

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## Making Inservice Programs Successful

Inservice has never been harder. The teachers that are the career professionals are from 40 to 45 years of age with 20 to 30 years of teaching left. They have attended alot of inservice programs and, needless to say, are hard to reach. But if they don't change, the schools don't change. Many of these teachers appear at inservice sessions tired, under stress, resentful, and hardened. They believe they have heard it all. To make things worse, many teachers seem to be looking for statements that indicate the inservice presenter does not understand the specific realities of the teacher's situation, and some tend to use such statements to discount the entire inservice program. How can these and other more interested teachers be reached? Should they be lectured to in large groups, approached individually, or taught in small support groups?

Instructional methods are chosen on the basis of how the affect the achievement of the objectives of the inservice program. While the specific objectives of each inservice vary, there are a set of general objectives that most inservice programs try to achieve. These objectives not only include mastering new strategies and procedures, they involve attitude changes and substaining new behavioral patterns for weeks, months, and years after the inservice has ended. Conducting a successful inservice borders on being about as easy as running a successful weight loss clinic.

In most inservices, the overall objectves deal with influencing teachers to make the following types of statements: "I understand it!" "I like it!" "I really want to try it!" "I believe I can do it!" "I'm not alone, my colleagues also want to try it!" "If I have trouble doing it, my colleagues will help me!" "My colleagues will really respect me when they see how well I'm doing it!" These statements reflect the objectives of having teachers (1) understand and master the strategies and procedures being presented, (2) develop positive attitudes toward them, (3) be motivated to try them, (4) develop a sense of personal efficacy concerning their use, (5) believe a common purpose to use the strategies and procedures is shared with colleagues, (6) are aware of how support and assistance will be provided by colleagues and administrators, and (7) believe that the successful use of the strategies and procedures will win the respect and approval of colleagues and administrators.

The major question for conducting successful inservice programs is, "What instructional procedures do we use to ensure that the above seven objectives are achieved?" The answer it <u>not</u> to lecture, entertain, and focus on individuals! Yet most inservice programs consist of up to 90 percent lecture; concentrate on entertaining teachers with jokes, stories, and media presentations; and use the word "individualize" every minute or two. This traditional approach makes the following assumptions, the validity of which you can judge for yourself:

True False 1. If teachers can pass a knowledge-awareness test on the innovation, they will try it out and continue to use it.

True False 2. A few good jokes and stories will entice teachers to incorporate the new strategies and procedures into their day-to-day classroom activities.

True False 3. An enthusiastic presentation will convince teachers that they have the personal power and competence to make the innovation work in their classroom.

True False 4. A flashy media presentation takes away the feelings of isolation, nonsupport, and harrassment experienced by many teachers.

True False 5. New teaching practices can be implemented and sustained in isolation from colleagues.

True False 6. Teachers do not give a damn about the recognition and respect of their colleagues.

All of the above assumptions are false. Yet the lecture-entertainment-individual approach used in many inservice programs is based on these assumptions. Lecturing does have its place, entertainment can help an inservice program, and the individual needs of every teacher have to be taken into account. But these three practices cannot be the heart of a successful inservice program. There is another instructional strategy that is far more effective in affecting teacher's achievement, attitudes, motivation, and sense of collaboration with colleagues.

Cooperative Learning, Collaborative Groups

The instructional strategies you use during an inservice program may speak so loudly that participating teachers will not be able to hear what you say. You cannot successfully tell teachers to be motivated, you cannot successfully lecture on support and assistance among colleagues, you cannot successfully tutor an individual teacher into a sense of joint purpose, and you cannot successfully entertain teachers into feeling respected and valued by their colleagues. To be successful, inservice programs need to utilize cooperative learning activities during the inservice and create collaborative support groups to assist implementation efforts after the inservice program has ended. Changing teachers' attitudes and behavioral patterns, and then maintaining the changes over time requires other people. It is the quality of the teacher-teacher interaction during and following an inservice program that will generally make or break it.

Teachers may be organized into cohesive support groups by: (1) placing them in small, cooperative groups to discuss the material being presented in the inservice program, (2) having teachers plan as a group how they will implement the material in their classrooms, and (3) providing the structure and mechanisms for teachers to give each other support and assistance while the material is tried out and integrated into their instructional activities. Cooperative learning activities and ongoing collaborative support groups are built on teachers perceiving positive interdependence between them and a set of their colleagues. Teachers need to be placed in small groups and given a task that requires them to achieve a joint purpose (goal interdependence), that no one teacher could achieve alone (resource interdependence), and that all will benefit from (reward interdependence). To explain fully

how to do this would take far more space than is available for this article. In the next few pages, therefore, we shall concentrate on providing a clear rationale for the use of cooperative learning and support groups and outline the procedures to be followed by inservice staff in structuring cooperative learning activities during an inservice activity and structuring and maintaining collaborative support groups after an inservice program has ended.

Cooperative Teams and the Goals of Inservice

There is considerable research documenting the effects of cooperative interaction within small groups with competitive and individualistic efforts (Johnson & Johnson, 1975, 1978). Much of this research has direct implications for the conducting of inservice programs. In this section we will first state a major goal of inservice programs and then briefly review the research evidence concerning the efficacy of teaching teachers in small, collaborative teams, or as individuals.

Goal 1: To promote maximal understanding, mastery, and retention of the material being presented. There is considerable evidence that cooperative interaction promotes higher achievement than does interpersonal competition or individualistic efforts. Johnson, Maruyama, Johnson, Nelson, and Skon (1980) recently completed a meta-analysis of 108 studies that compared the relative effects of cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning experiences on achievement. The results indicate that the average person within a cooperative learning experience will achieve at about the 80 percentile of the competitive and individualistic conditions. Not only is material understood better and mastered at a higher level within cooperative learning situations, the material is retained longer (Johnson & Johnson, 1975, 1978).

Goal 2: To develop positive attitudes toward the material being presented. There is considerable evidence that indicates cooperative learning experiences promote more positive attitudes toward the knowledge and skills being learned that do competitive and individualistic learning experiences (Johnson & Johnson, 1975, 1978). In addition, there is considerable research indicating

that: (a) the attitudes of an individual are strongly influenced by the groups to which he or she belong, (b) participation in group discussions helps overcome resistance to adopting the new attitudes that are being presented, (c) it is easier ot modify the attitudes of individuals when they are in a group than it is to modify the attitudes of single individuals, and (d) attitudes that people make known publicly are more resistant to later attacks than are attitudes that are private (Watson & Johnson, 1972). Thus, participation in a cooperative learning experience promotes more positive attitudes and the small group setting is more optimal for building positive attitudes toward the material in a way that is resistant to later change when the teachers return to their schools and classrooms.

Goal 3: To maximize teachers' motivation to implement the material being presented in their classrooms. There is considerable research indicating that cooperative learning experiences, compared with competitive and individualistic ones, promote higher levels of motivation, more intrinsic motivation, and more continuing motivation to use the material in the future (Johnson & Johnson, 1975, 1978). In addition, there is evidence that involvement in small group decision-making about how to implement the material being presented increases motivation and commitment to implement (Watson & Johnson, 1972).

Goal 4: To maximize teachers' sense of personal efficacy or an "I can do this in my classroom" belief. There is evidence that cooperative learning experiences, compared with competitive and individualistic ones, promote a higher sense of personal efficacy or internal locus of control (Johnson & Johnson, 1975, 1978). A sense of personal power seems to result from sitting down with a group of peers and planning how to implement new knowledge

and skills. The giving and getting that takes place as teachers jointly plan how to implement the innovation facilitates teachers' awareness of their own resources, identifies their needs, builds supportive relationships with colleagues, and promotes a feeling of being able to solve personally any problems that may arise in implementation.

Goals 5, 6, and 7: To maximize teachers' beliefs that implementing the material is a purpose shared by colleagues and administrators, that they will receive the support and assistance of colleagues and administrators during their implementation efforts, and that if they are successful they will receive increased recognition and respect from colleagues and administrators. There is considerable evidence that cooperative learning experiences, compared with competitive and individualistic ones, result in more positive peer relationships characterized by mutual liking, positive attitudes toward each other, mutual concern, friendliness, attentiveness, feelings of obligation to each other, and desire to win each other's respect (Johnson & Johnson, 1975, 1978). These results hold for individuals from different backgrounds, ages, ethnic membership, and ability levels. Teachers in an inservice program who are very different in age, philosophy, and background can build strong positive relationships when they interact together in cooperative groups. In addition, it is much easier to build the group norms of giving each other support, assistance, and help when teachers interact in small groups than when they are taught as individuals (Watson & Johnson, 1972). Finally, the more teachers publicly commit themselves to implement the material being presented, the more recognition and respect individuals will receive from colleagues for doing so.

Fringe Benefits: There are four major fringe benefits school districts and inservice personnel may receive from primarily using cooperative learning groups during inservice presentations and as support teams following inservice presentations (Johnson & Johnson, 1975, 1978). The first is that collaborative experiences will improve relationships among teachers and between teachers and administrators. The second is that as teachers work together in small, task-oriented groups, their interpersonal skills will increase, increasing their competence to work effectively with each other in the future. Third, participation in cooperative learning experiences will increase the positiveness of teachers' evaluation of the inservice program, affecting their willingness to participate in future inservice opportunties. Finally, participation in cooperative learning groups will increase the positiveness of teachers' evaluations of the inservice staff.

There are perhaps two additional points that need to be made in this section. The first is that working effectively in collaborative groups requires a certain level of interpersonal skill. Some teachers may need to increase their communication, trust-building, leadership, and conflict resolution skills in order to be an effective team member. The second is that the research reviewed in this section is comparative, not absolute. While cooperative learning experiences promote the achievement of inservice goals to a greater extent than do competitive or individualistic learning experiences, cooperation is not a magic wand that solves all problems. Cooperative experiences with colleagues does not make struggling teachers into master teachers or a resistant into an interested and committed audience. The data indicate that inservice staff have a better chance of reaching their goals when cooperative learning experiences are emphasized.

## Structuring Cooperative Activities

When an inservice program begins, the staff needs to plan carefully how cooperative learning activities and collaborative support groups are to be structured. The heart of placing teachers into a "sink or swim together" situation is to: (1) give them a task highlighting their common goal, (2) arrange membership in the groups so that their goal can be achieved only by pooling the expertise and resources of several members, (3) ensure that all members will benefit equally from their joint efforts to implement the innovation in their classrooms, and (4) give the groups enough autonomy and environmental support that they can realistically adapt the innovation to their school situation. Remember, the way in which instruction and followup activities are structured is the most important message communicated during the inservice program. It is not what you say, it is how you do it! More specifically, the procedures for structuring cooperative activities are summarized in the following questions:

1. How large should each group be? Usually, cooperative groups of teachers have four to six members, depending on the resources need within each group, the amount of time available to meet, and the teachers' level of interpersonal skills.

2. How can resource interdependence be ensured? In order for the group to continue after the inservice program has ended, teachers must believe that there are resources within the group that are essential for their personal success in implementing the strategies being presented. Careful attention as to (a) who is assigned to each group and (b) how supplies, materials, and other resources are distributed among group members, will ensure that resource interdependence will be perceived.

3. Who is assigned to each group? Group members may be teachers from the same school, grade level, subject area, or geographical location. Special education teachers or curriculum consultants may be part of a group. Group membership should reflect both a need for resource interdependence and the ability of the group to meet regularly during the school year to ensure the implementation of the material being presented.

4. How is goal interdependence created? The tasked presented by the inservice staff to groups of teachers must make it clear that they are in a "sink or swim together" situation in which teachers must cooperate with each other to produce a group product. In setting the goal structure, explain the task, define the group product to be produced, explain the criteria by which the group will judge their success, and describe the group skills needed to work together effectively.

5. How will we know the groups are working together well? The inservice staff needs some way of monitoring the behavior of teachers within the groups both during and following the inservice program. The effectiveness of teachers in working together and the progress they are making in completing the assigned tasks may be observed during the inservice program, while their skill in providing support and assistance to each other may be monitored subsequently to the inservice program. A listing of the group skills needed for effective team functioning is found in Johnson and F. Johnson (1975).

6. How can teachers' group skills be improved? As the group meets during and following the inservice program, a number of skills are needed. Leadership, conflict resolution, trust building, and communication skills are only a few of the group skills teachers need to master. One important set of skills involves giving nonjudgmental support. Nonjudgmental support

involves giving descriptive, nonevaluative feedback to each other based on direct observation of each other's implementation efforts. Such feedback involves low inference observation where teachers watch and record events according to some prearranged set of relatively objective categories, agreed on by the group. During the inservice, teachers may be given observation forms to use in observing each other's implementation efforts and may be trained in how to provide each other with nonevaluative feedback (see Johnson, 1972). In addition, other activities aimed at teaching group skills may be used during an inservice program.

7. How is evaluation of the groups' efforts managed? Periodically, the groups need to evaluate their own progress in implementing the innovation. It is absolutely essential that evaluations be based on a criterion-referenced system where a group assesses its efforts and compares the results against a preset criterion of excellence. At times, administrators may wish to evaluate the teacher groups.

8. How are rewards to be distributed? Rewards may be symbolic (such as feedback on how well the group is functioning or the recognition and respect of one's colleagues and administrators) or rewards may be tangible (such as released time or summer employment). When rewards are distributed, it is essential that all members of the group receive the same reward. Teachers need to believe that they will benefit equally from the overall efforts of the group, and such a belief is the essence of reward interdependence.

## Summary

Perhaps even more than classroom teachers, inservice staff must use effective and appropriate instructional procedures. The ability of the inservice staff to create learning situations that maximize achievement, positive attitudes, motivation, a sense of personal efficacy, and a shared purpose is the most important message the staff communicates. Effective instruction in the inservice setting requires the use of cooperative learning groups during the inservice sessions followed by the use of collaborative support groups to assist and maintain the implementation of the innovation being presented. Such an approach recognizes that learning, attitude change, behavior change, and the maintenance of new teaching patterns are best facilitated by cooperative interaction with colleagues and administrators. It is the nature and quality of the teacher-teacher interaction during and following the inservice program that most determines whether it is a success or a failure. The implications of using cooperative learning activities, furthermore, go well beyond the successful implementation of a new set of teaching strategies. As teachers and administrators become more skillful in interacting with each other in collaborative activities, their interactions with students and parents will become more constructive and effective.

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